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AUTHOR Anglin, Leo W.; Dugan, Therese
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ABSTRACT

Teachers in a small midwestern suburban school district were asked to select, from a list of five metaphors, the ones which best characterized their actual and the ideal curriculum. They were also asked to choose the metaphors best characterizing the curricular position of the school superintendent, board of education, parents, and other teachers. The curriculum metaphors were: (1) "Medicine"--the curriculum is a dispensary from which students receive treatment under the direction of a competent and proficient general diagnostician; (2) "Growth"--the curriculum is the greenhouse where students will grow and develop to their fullest potential under the care of a wise and patient gardener; (3) "Travel"--the curriculum is a route over which students will travel under the leadership of an experienced guide and companion; (4) "Production"--the curriculum is the means of production, and the student is the raw material which will be transformed into a finished and useful product; and (5) "Natural Resources"--the curriculum is the plan for developing and utilizing the natural resources of ability present in the student. No one metaphor emerged as best characterizing classroom curriculum practice. However, elementary teachers were perceived to be growth-oriented while secondary teachers were characterized by the production metaphors. The teachers perceived the superintendent's ideal to be growth-oriented, but the board of education and parents were seen to be production-oriented and as controlling the curriculum in conflict with the ideals of the professional staff. (JD)

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Teachers' Perceptions of Existing and Ideal School Curriculum: An Analysis of Metaphors

LEO W. ANGLIN, Kent State University
SISTER THERESE DUGAN, Notre Dame College

This paper reports the results of a study designed to document teachers' perceptions of the existing curriculum in their school district and compares that with their perception of an ideal curriculum. The study provides information regarding the status of curriculum in a suburban midwestern school district and the impact staff development programs have on that curriculum. The theoretical framework for the study emerged from three major areas: perception theory, value theory, and organizational theory. The study represents an important step in understanding the importance that conflicting conceptualizations of curriculum have on the day-to-day operation of schools. Recommendations are made regarding the use of this research in schools and for further research using metaphors as a medium for communicating about curriculum.

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF EXISTING AND IDEAL SCHOOL CURRICULUM: AN ANALYSIS OF METAPHORS

Sr. Therese Dugan, SND
Notre Dame College

Leo W. Anglin
Kent State University

Paper presented at the annual meeting of
the American Educational Research Association,
New York, March 20, 1982

Curriculum Metaphors

This presentation reports the findings of a study designed to identify classroom teachers' (K-12) perspectives regarding school curriculum. The study was conducted in conjunction with a suburban school district that had recently implemented a teacher-initiated Gifted Education Staff Development Program. Teachers and administrators were asked to describe their ideal curricular beliefs and compare those beliefs with actual curricular practice in their school building and school district. Through structured interviews and surveys curriculum metaphors were used as the organizers for data collection.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study

Eisner and Vallance (1974) have provided five perspectives of curriculum which are advocated in curricular discussions. They, along with others, especially MacDonald (1975, 1977), posit that differences in curricular perspectives are based on underlying values and goals, and the difficulty in resolving the differences lies in the failure to examine the conceptual underpinnings of each position. A substantial body of literature (Bidwell, 1973; Lortie, 1973; Anglin, 1979) argues that the study of curriculum without the consideration of the educational setting in which the curriculum is implemented is a mistake. Curriculum related tasks and performances of the classroom teacher are significantly influenced by the organizational setting of the school. Furthermore, the effective schools research (Edmonds, 1979) argues that the effectiveness of one curricular perspective over another is largely

determined by the compatibility of the perspective between the teachers and administrators in the school. The greater the congruence among all members of the school organization regarding curricular goals, the more likely the school will be effective.

The purpose of this study was not how curriculum is formulated nor how it is implemented in a single classroom. Rather, it was to attempt to gain a better understanding of teachers' curriculum perspectives within a school organization.

The specific purposes of this study were to determine:

1. Teachers' perceptions of the actual school curriculum.
2. Teachers' perceptions of the ideal curriculum and how it differs from the actual curriculum.
3. Teachers' perceptions of how significant others in the school system view curriculum.

Methodology

Curriculum metaphors were employed in this descriptive study to determine how teachers perceived the actual curriculum in their school. They were also used to determine how the teachers' perceptions of the actual curriculum compared to their ideal perspective. Metaphors play a major role in the understanding of language and word meaning; they provide the possibility of communicating a more wholistic and vivid impression of a phenomena (Ortony, 1975). As Snow (1973, p. 82) describes, "Metaphors are basic heuristics for theoretical speculation in science." They were used in this study to organize respondents' views toward a wholistic view of the curricular phenomenon. This ability of the metaphor to communicate was recognized by Kliebard (1972) when he formulated and published three curriculum

metaphors--metaphor of growth, metaphor of travel, and metaphor of production. These were seen to be useful for research by Anglin (1979) who added a metaphor of medicine to Kliebard's list. An additional metaphor--metaphor of natural resources--was added for the purposes of this study (see Appendix I).

The Conduct of the Study

Subjects

The subjects of this study consisted of 75 teachers and administrators (K-12) of a small midwestern suburban school district. The community served by the school district was made up of primarily middle income families.

Data Collection

Survey. A questionnaire was distributed to all 75 teachers of the school district. Fifty-eight questionnaires (77%) were returned. The questionnaire asked each subject to select the curriculum metaphor which best characterized the actual, "real," curricular perspective they use in their individual classrooms. They were also asked to identify the curriculum metaphor which best described that curriculum perspective that represented the actual curricular perspective of the school district. In the same questionnaire, subjects were asked to identify the metaphor which best characterized their perception of the ideal curriculum for their classroom and for the school system in general. Participants were also asked to indicate their perception of the curricular stance assumed by the superintendent, board of education, parents, and to describe the curricular approaches they perceived other teachers to take according to instructional assignments, e.g., what is the curricular approach most typically used by middle school teachers?

Structured interviews. A stratified random sample was used to select a group of respondents for follow-up structured interviews. Two teachers on each instructional level--primary, intermediate, middle school, and high school--were selected. An exception to the random sampling was made to include two teachers of gifted classes, one on the primary level and one on the intermediate level. Consequently, only one other teacher on each of these two levels was selected randomly.

The purpose of the interview was to determine the respondent's rationale for metaphor choices. It also enabled the researcher to ask the respondents to elaborate about their perceptions related to the real and ideal curricular perspectives at various levels of the school system.

The results of the questionnaire were analyzed by means of frequency counts and contingency tables. The interview responses were analyzed by the construction of semantic domains using the abbreviated version of the process suggested by Spradley (1979). Spradley defines a domain as a category or facet of the interviewees' thinking. It is presented graphically as having a "cover term" which is the generic term in the domain; a set of "included terms" which expand the meaning of the cover term; and a "semantic relationship" which connects the two sets of terms (see Figure 1). In this study, domains were constructed from the responses of teachers relative to each metaphor. This provided insight into what teachers meant when they talked about curriculum-related concepts such as student growth or diagnostic teaching.

Results

Teachers' perceptions of the actual curriculum they teach in their own classrooms revealed a "mixed bag" reality. The survey results revealed that

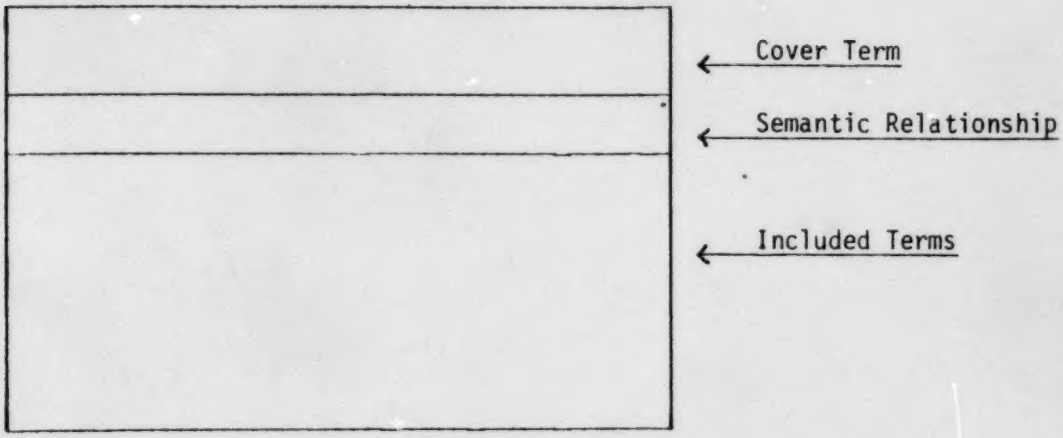

Figure 1. Semantic Domain (Spradley, 1979)

the metaphors best characterizing the real curriculum in individual classrooms were varied. However, over half the respondents (51%) did select the metaphor of growth as best characterizing the ideal curriculum in their classrooms. At the school district level the largest consensus, although not significant, among teachers indicated that the actual school district curriculum was best characterized by the production metaphor, while the ideal curriculum was best depicted by the growth metaphor (see Table 1).

The structured interview data supported the results of the questionnaire. It was found, however, that two types of teachers were responding. Some teachers were annoyed by the questionnaire and admitted they do not think much about what they are doing, or why, or how. They proceeded on a day-to-day basis and generally met organizational demands without question. The second group reported having definite philosophies about curricular goals and the organizational patterns the curriculum takes in their classrooms. These teachers described the questionnaire as thought-provoking and challenging. The two domains or categories of thought most prominent in the interview responses of these teachers deal with the organization of curriculum or the format and with the role of the teacher in teaching it. None of the teachers interviewed questioned the content they were asked to teach. Figures 2-5 are illustrations of domains derived from responses related to two of the metaphors--growth and production.

Strong support was voiced for the superintendent who was viewed by the majority of interviewees as "growth-oriented." There was a question about whether principals were growth-oriented or production-oriented. Parents were spoken of as being production-oriented, but teachers who were parents identified themselves as growth-oriented. One teacher, when questioned about this discrepancy, stated that teachers misread parents' goals for their children. Without exception teachers perceived the Board of Education

Table 1

Summary of Teacher Responses on Curricular Perceptions

	Real	Ideal
Classroom	Very evenly distributed	51.7% growth
School	39.7% Production 22.4% Travel 12.1% Others	48.3% growth
Gifted Curriculum	25.9% Growth 25.9% Travel	41.4% growth
Staff Development (in Gifted Educ)	31.0% Medium 20.7% Production	
Superintendent	31.0% Growth 22.4% Production	
Principal	31.0% Growth 31.0% Production	
Board	29.3% Production 27.6% Growth	
Parents	29.3% Production 22.4% Growth	

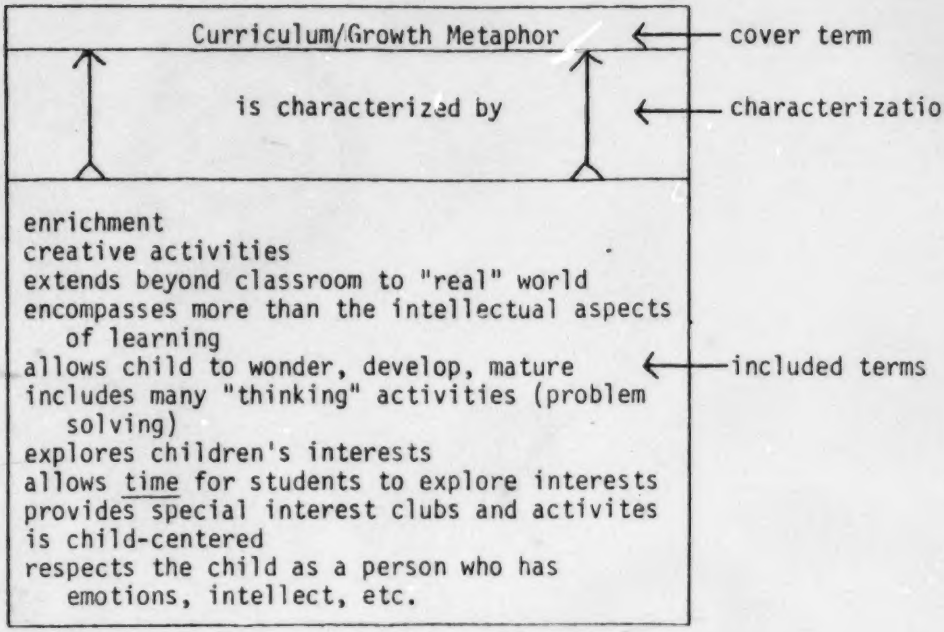
Curriculum/Growth Metaphor
cover term
is characterized by
characterization
enrichment
creative activities
extends beyond classroom to "real" world
encompasses more than the intellectual aspects of learning
allows child to wonder, develop, mature
includes many "thinking" activities (problem solving)
explores children's interests
allows time for students to explore interests
provides special interest clubs and activites
is child-centered
respects the child as a person who has emotions, intellect, etc.
included terms

Figure 2. Characteristics of growth-oriented curriculum derived from analysis of interview results.

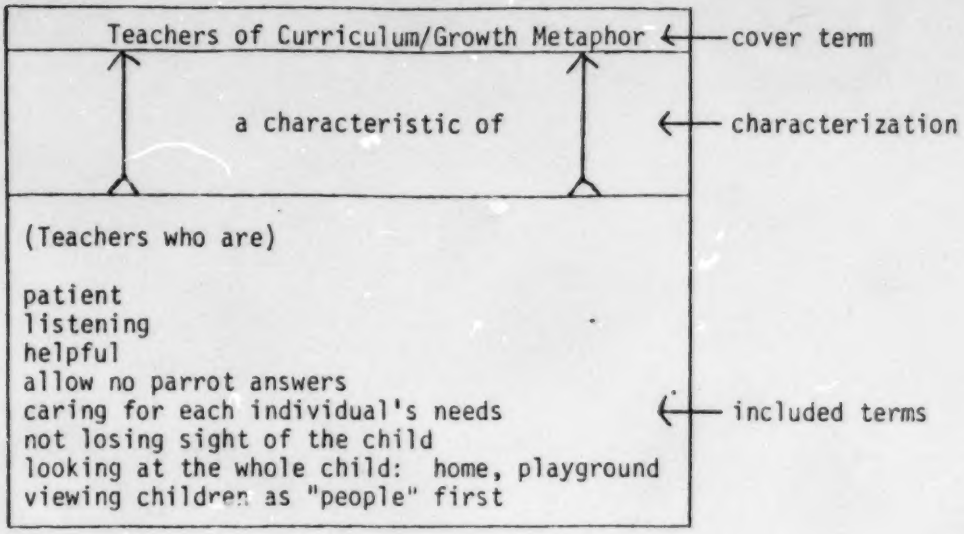

Figure 3. Characteristics of growth-oriented teachers derived by domain analysis of interview responses.

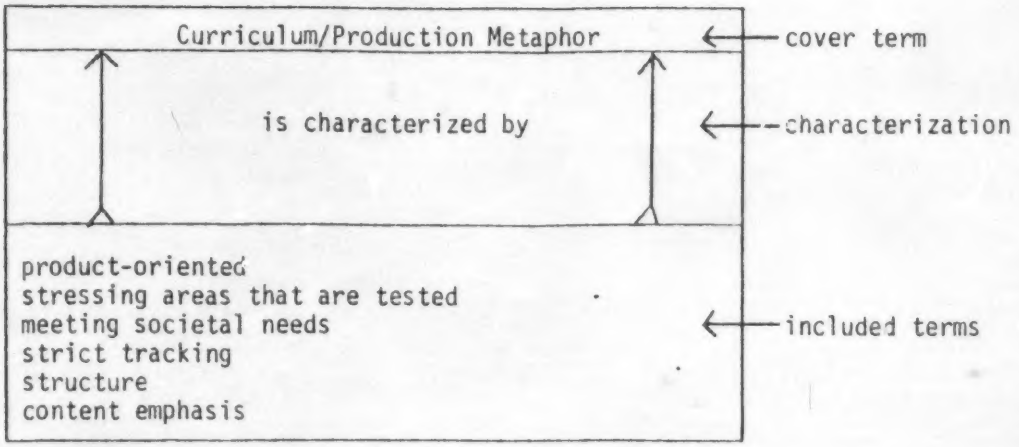

Figure 4. Characteristics of production-oriented curriculum derived by domain analysis of interview responses.

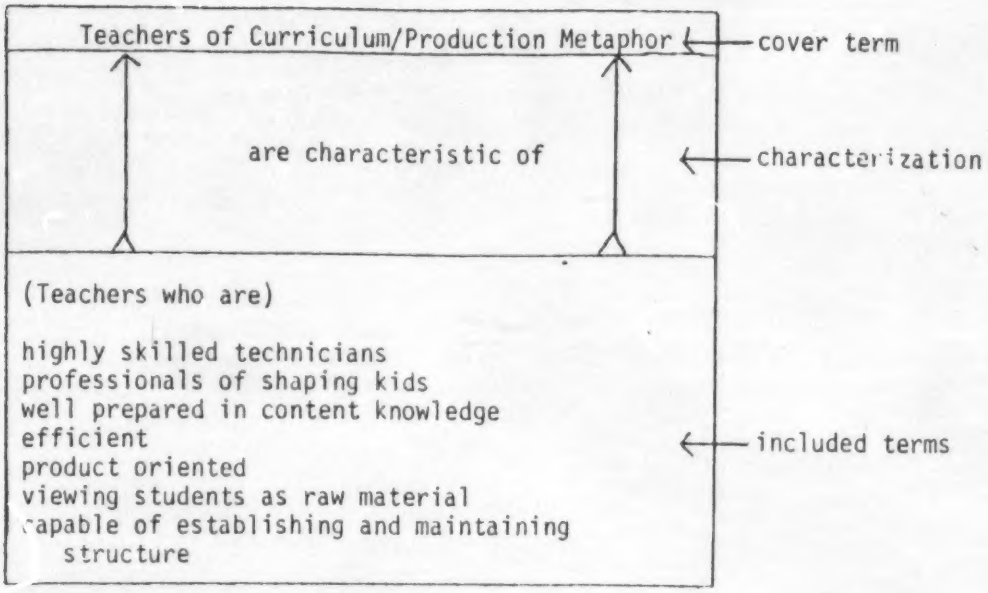

Figure 5. Characteristics of production-oriented teachers derived by domain analysis of interview responses.

to be production-oriented with expectations for administration and teachers to produce students who could get good employment. When questioned about a growth-oriented superintendent operating under a production-oriented board, two teachers responded that the curriculum is production-oriented because of the political pressure exerted on him by the Board of Education.

Discussion

Among the findings that surfaced in this research is the confirmation that metaphors are a useful medium for discussing curriculum with teachers. The wholistic nature of the metaphor as opposed to isolated curriculum components, e.g., objectives and learning activities, appears to facilitate and stimulate insightful thinking. Metaphors appear to be harmonious with the total reality of the classroom in which the teacher is engulfed. In addition, each of the metaphors has a definite philosophical orientation, and while teachers would view discussing the philosophy of curriculum as heavy, they were energetic and eager to discuss the metaphors.

From the questionnaire and the interview data, there appears to be no unified approach to curriculum in the school district. This raises the question of the educational impact of the school's efforts. These results exist in spite of the fact that printed curriculum guides do not represent a "mixed bag" approach. The finding supports the statement of Doyle and Ponder (1977) who stated that teachers tend to "adapt" rather than "adopt" a curriculum. According to Doyle and Ponder (1977), teachers do this adapting to bring the curriculum around to where it has meaning for them, i.e., adapting it to the point where it coincides with their goals, whatever these may be.

While the polling of individual teachers represents a mixed bag approach to curriculum, the results of the study indicate a major gravitation toward a single ideal: Curriculum characterized by the growth metaphor. This shared idealism becomes even more promising of a unified approach when one considers that the superintendent is viewed by a large group of teachers as being growth-oriented as well. He is supported in this, according to some teachers' perceptions, by principals who also share this curricular stance. Strong support was voiced for the superintendent during most of the interviews.

On the whole, there was much evidence of congruence within the system in the realm of the ideal. On the other hand, there was also evidence of conflict between teachers' ideal perceptions of curriculum and the perceived expectations of the parents and the Board of Education. If teachers' perceptions are accurate, the conflict between parents and teachers is not surprising if one accepts the theory that the schools which hold to values other than those dominant in the economic market place will have limited influence on the choice-making of the students. This leaves the teachers with minimal leverage for motivation of students in curricular matters.

The teachers' perceptions of parental expectations needs to be further examined and evidence collected on the accuracy of these perceptions. Lightfoot (1982) reviewed and critiqued the literature on parent-school relationships and found the portrayals of the relationships to be oversimplified, distorted, and stereotyped. Likewise, the Board of Education was perceived by teachers to be production-oriented whereas the superintendent is perceived to be growth-oriented. The accuracy of these perceptions requires documentation, and further ethnographic research is suggested by the question

of how a growth-oriented superintendent deals with a production-oriented school board.

In summary, the purpose of this research was to obtain teachers' perceptions of existing curriculum and to compare these with their perceptions of the ideal curriculum. Although no one metaphor emerged as best characterizing actual (real) classroom curriculum practice, other patterns did emerge. Elementary teachers were perceived to be growth-oriented while the middle school and high school teachers were characterized by the production metaphor. The teachers perceived the superintendent's ideal to be growth-oriented, like their own ideal. However, the teachers perceived the Board of Education to be production-oriented. These findings indicated that there was a major source conflict among the school organizations' major constituencies. The teachers reported disparate curricular approaches being used at the classroom level but a unified idealism among teachers and between teachers and administrators. Board of Education members and parents were perceived as production-oriented and as controlling the curriculum in conflict with the ideals of the professional staff.

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APPENDIX I
CURRICULUM METAPHOR INSTRUMENT

INSTRUCTIONS: Listed below are five metaphors describing approaches to curriculum. Please read them carefully and then respond to the survey questions.

A. THE METAPHOR OF MEDICINE

The Curriculum is a dispensary from which students receive medical treatments under the ever present direction of a competent and proficient general diagnostician. Each patient has unique and varying ills, but the diagnostician, using precise and scientific diagnostic techniques, prescribes the proper medicine. Many of the remedies developed by the specialist are self-administered. The diagnostician intervenes only when some problem arises with the treatment which has been prescribed, or when therapy is needed. The science of medicine rather than guesswork will be used to help each patient to mature to his fullest potential.

B. THE METAPHOR OF GROWTH

The curriculum is the greenhouse where students will grow and develop to their fullest potential under the care of a wise and patient gardener. The plants that grow in the greenhouse are of every variety, but the gardener treats each according to its needs, so that each plant comes to flower. This universal blooming cannot be accomplished by leaving some plants unattended. All plants are nurtured with great solicitude, but no attempt is made to divert the inherent potential of the individual plant from its own metamorphosis or development to the whims and desires of the gardener.

C. THE METAPHOR OF TRAVEL

The curriculum is a route over which students will travel under the leadership of an experienced guide and companion. Each traveler will be affected differently by the journey since its effect is at least as much a function of the intelligence, interests, and intent of the traveler as it is of the contours of the route. This variability is not only inevitable, but wondrous and desirable. Therefore, no effort is made to anticipate the exact nature of the effect on the traveler; but a great effort is made to plot the route so that the journey will be as rich, as fascinating, and as memorable as possible.

D. THE METAPHOR OF PRODUCTION

The curriculum is the means of production, and the student is the raw material which will be transformed into a finished and useful product under the control of a highly skilled technician. The outcome of the production process is carefully plotted in advance according to rigorous design specifications, and when certain means of production prove to be wasteful, they are discarded in favor of more efficient ones. Great care is taken so that raw materials of a particular quality of composition are channeled into the proper production systems and that no potentially useful characteristic of the raw material is wasted.

E. THE METAPHOR OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The curriculum is the plan for developing and effectively utilizing the natural resources of human ability present in the student. The development of any one natural resource must be seen in terms of its effects upon the larger system. All resources that exist are by definition beneficial to humankind and should be carefully and respectfully developed. Some, however, are related to survival while others meet the non-material needs of humankind. Both of these should be developed with special care.